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## « When Golden Time Convents » Shakespeare's Eastern Promise

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# Shakespeare et l'Orient



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## « WHEN GOLDEN TIME CONVENTS » SHAKESPEARE'S EASTERN PROMISE

Richard WILSON

At the British Museum's *Shah Abbas* exhibition quotations from *Twelfth Night* reassured visitors Shakespeare was as familiar with 'the Sophy' as with Elizabeth. But critics of the show objected that an emphasis on 'the food of love' effaces Islamic violence, and by taking the quotations out of context curators also elided religious conflict in Elizabethan England. They ignored the way references to the Sherley brothers in *Twelfth Night* encode Catholic plots to exploit the Shah for Essex and King James. But a Tate Gallery *Van Dyck* exhibition showed Robert Sherley in his silk suit as 'fencer to the Sophy' and Persian ambassador to Rome; and it is this complexity that Shakespeare stages in his Epiphany play, with its hope for 'golden time' but suspense that like Robert's ambiguous suit from Abbas, 'What's to come is still unsure'.

*Lors de l'exposition sur le Shah Abbas au British Museum les citations de Twelfth Night confirmaient aux visiteurs que Shakespeare connaissait aussi bien le « Sophi » qu'Élisabeth. Mais des critiques ont reproché à cette exposition d'effacer la violence de l'Islam au profit des « nourritures de l'amour » et d'évacuer le conflit religieux en présentant des citations hors contexte. Ils ont négligé le fait que les références aux frères Sherley dans Twelfth Night font allusion à des complots catholiques pour exploiter le Shah pour le compte d'Essex et du roi Jacques. Mais une exposition sur Van Dyck à la Tate Gallery a montré Robert Sherley en habit de soie, en tant qu'ambassadeur perse à Rome et c'est cette complexité que Shakespeare met en scène dans Twelfth Night en insistant sur l'ambiguïté et l'incertitude : 'What's to come is still unsure'.*

**A**t the British Museum, the grand exhibition entitled *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* that opened beneath the mosque-like dome of the former Reading Room on February 19 2009 was deliberately kept dark to protect delicate parchments and textiles on display, but the effect was to perpetuate the cliché of a seductive oriental mystery. As *The Times* excitedly reported, 'The spectator – like some traveller arriving along one of the East-West trade routes – is led into a strange, elaborate and literally shadowy land of men with drooping moustaches and shadowy designer stubble, of worshipping dervishes and Islamic-style dandies, of Indian ambassadors bringing their exotic gifts, of prancing Arab stallions and hooded hunting hawks'. The result, gasped Rachel Campbell-Johnston, was that 'Weaving your way through it can feel a bit like picking your way through the labyrinth of one of the carpets. This world is intricate, complex, luxurious, and rare. It can also be difficult'. But *The Times* reporter was in no doubt of the urgency of confronting the challenge, now Iran looks 'stubbornly unapproachable, nurturing its hardline

fundamentalism and nuclear programme'.<sup>1</sup> The question this prompted, of course, is how this 'shadowy' Islamic world would relate to the great 'Reading Room' in Bloomsbury that was so close to the sites of the July 7 2005 bombings: would it appear as a miracle or a monster?

The *Shah Abbas* exhibition was praised by the press for reminding us of a time when envoys were sent to Iran 'by Elizabeth I from a desire to build trading relations' and because of her 'view that Iran was an equal on the international stage'.<sup>2</sup> The museum's director Neil MacGregor encouraged this response when he asserted that while he found the smiles of the current Iranian leadership 'delphic', the aim of the show was 'to make it easier for people to start thinking about that complexity'. MacGregor proposed that to understand Shah Abbas we need only recall the 'key parallel' of his contemporary, 'our own nation-shaping Elizabeth I', who broke with Rome just as his Shi'ite state warred with the Sunni Ottomans: 'In a strange way,' the director told newspapers, Elizabethan England became 'the only other state to have such a close formal link between the state structure and the state church'.<sup>3</sup> So to underline the elective affinity between Elizabeth's England and the Shah's Iran, and to guide us through the Shia maze, the organizers laid a trail of helpful literary clues: repeated throughout the display citations of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* reassured the visitor that the Safavid ruler whom the dramatist called 'the Sophy' had been as familiar and impressive to Shakespeare as Gloriana herself:

SIR TOBY. Why, man, he's the very devil, I have not seen such a virago. I had a pass with him, rapier, scabbard, and all, and he gives me the stuck in with such a mortal motion that it is inevitable, and on the answer, he pays you as surely as your feet hits the ground they step on. They say he has been a fencer to the Sophy. (III.iv.243-8)

'This is the economy, stupid', MacGregor reassured *The Financial Times* readers: Shakespeare knew about the Shah because Abbas opened Iran to English traders, and the multi-cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Campbell-Johnston, 'Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran at the British Museum', *The Times*, February 14 2009 ([http://www.britishmuseum.org/the\\_museum/museum\\_in\\_london/shah\\_abbas.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/museum_in_london/shah_abbas.aspx)).

<sup>2</sup> James Mills, 'Back To The Future with Iran Diplomacy', *The Tribune*, February 24 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Aspden, 'Vaster Than Empires', *The Financial Times*, February 7 2009.

tolerant society he is said to have created in Isfahan arose from that 'economic expediency'.<sup>4</sup> All the exquisite images of this 'enlightened despot' drinking with foreigners therefore have less to do with the 'rapier, scabbard, and all,' they feature so prominently than with the 'soft power' of porcelain diplomacy: the china plate's the thing, in British Museum terms, to catch the conscience of the king. A cult of such worldly goods replaces historical analysis in much of the virtual shopping that passes for current Renaissance studies. But reviewers noticed how this consumerism minimised the Shah's tyranny. Indeed, just two sentences in the sumptuous exhibition catalogue touch on his 'acts of extreme cruelty', such as 'having two of his sons blinded and another killed', cutting out the tongues of liars, or garrotting the dervishes who prophesied his death.<sup>5</sup> There was no mention of how 'One evening he went out dressed as a peasant and bought some bread and meat... to find he had been sold short. He had the baker thrown into an oven and the meat-seller roasted alive'.<sup>6</sup> Tactfully ignored too were his habits of boiling prisoners in oil, or castrating his eunuchs himself, albeit with such skill it was said 'very few boys died under his hands'.<sup>7</sup> And nowhere in this glittering showcase for 'The Art of Museum Diplomacy'<sup>8</sup> was any reference made to Abbas's own brand of diplomacy when he received the first embassy from the Emperor Rudolf II in 1603, and the ambassador Georg Tectander 'had an unnerving experience':

An Ottoman prisoner was brought in and Abbas called for two swords, which he then proceeded to examine. He chose one and sliced off the prisoner's head. Tectander feared the Shah had heard the Emperor Rudolf was making peace with the Ottomans and would use the second sword on him. Instead Abbas turned to Tectander with a smile and said that was how the Christians should treat the Turks.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Sheila Canby, 'Introduction', *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London: British Museum Press, 2009), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> David Blow, *Shah Abbas: The Ruthless King Who Became an Iranian Legend* (London: Tauris, 2009), p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133 & 173-4.

<sup>8</sup> William Lee Adams, 'The Art of Museum Diplomacy', *Time*, February 19 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Blow, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 77: quoting Georg Tectander, *Eine Abenteuerliche Reise Durch Russland Nach Persien, 1602-1604* (Tulln: Herausgegeben von Dorothea Mueller-Ott, 1978), p. 58.

European travellers to Iran were awed by the Shah's spectacular New Year presents, but also recorded that the gifts he loved to receive were heads, 'those of distinction enveloped in a silk turban, the others bare, and each thrust through with a lance'.<sup>10</sup> So, when Sir Anthony Sherley, the first English emissary to Iran, met Abbas in 1598 he was saluted by a thousand lancers waving heads of Uzbeks impaled on spears, with 'the ears on strings and hanged about their necks'. The Shah did not waste time, he reported, with talk of 'apparell, building, beauty of our women, or such vanities', but only wanted to hear 'of our proceeding in our warres, of our usuall Armes, of the commodity of Fortresses... of the use of Artillery'.<sup>11</sup> Since Sherley's father Sir Thomas was the Treasurer of War, what interested Abbas was how 'his new model army could be equipped with up-to-date weaponry'.<sup>12</sup> So the Englishman 'presented to the King a number of girdles and pistols he brought from Aleppo'.<sup>13</sup> His reward was a contract to retrain the Shah's gunners.<sup>14</sup> In view of the nuclear stand-off, this was not the kind of Anglo-Iranian exchange to feature in the exhibition. The problem with the Shakespeare quotations, however, was that if they were meant to help to rehabilitate a pariah state they were equally militaristic. Thus, the organisers posted without comment Sir Toby's warning shortly before Sebastian impales his skull, that his assailant is rumoured to be Shah Abbas's fencing-master; and referred without explanation to the Sunni Prince of Morocco's bloodcurdling war-cry that the scimitar he sports is one with which he 'slew the Sophy and a Persian prince / That won three fields of Sultan Suleiman' (*Merchant*, II.i.24-6). As Ladan Niayesh observes in a recent essay on 'Shakespeare's Persians', Morocco's shining scimitar not only reveals the variety of oriental Others, but destroys the binarism 'between the "West" and the "Rest"'.<sup>15</sup> So, perhaps Toby really does compare the chimerical 'devil' from Abbas with the transvestite 'virago' of Elizabeth. For suppressed in the museum's narrative of the triumph of globalization were the

<sup>10</sup> Pietro Della Valle, quoted in Blow, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Sherley, letter to Anthony Bacon, 12 February 1600, quoted *ibid.*, p. 54 & 56.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Abel Pinçon, quoted, D.W. Davies, *Elizabethans Errant: The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons, As Well in the Dutch Wars as in Muscovy, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and the Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> R. Savory, 'The Sherley Myth', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 5 (1967).

<sup>15</sup> Ladan Niayesh, 'Shakespeare's Persians', *Shakespeare*, 4 (2008), p. 127-36, here 128-9.

violent contradictions not only of Shah's Iran but of Shakespeare's England itself.<sup>16</sup>

'They say he has been a fencer to the Sophy': Sir Toby's threat that 'he pays you as *surely* as your feet hits the ground' may pun on reports from the Sherley mission of the war-game with which Abbas trained his troops, and with which a 1607 play, *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* would begin: 'He ran in among them with his sword drawn and gave four of them their death's wound... cutting off the arms from divers of them. One gentleman which did but only smile... the King gave him such a blow in the middle, that one half of his body fell from the other'.<sup>17</sup> For as is well known, these terrifying warnings about the Shah's swordsman refer to Sir Anthony's brother Robert Sherley, whose dazzling portrait beside that of his Iranian wife Teresia, the daughter of a Circassian chief Ishmael Khan, and a relative of Abbas, dominated the exhibition. Stylistically, these masque-like paintings resemble those mass-produced for the early Jacobean court, and must date from 1611, when as the catalogue records, 'Teresia gave birth at the Sherley home in Sussex to a son, Henry, probably the first child born in England of Iranian descent'.<sup>18</sup> Although she is shown wearing a type of veil, the most alienating feature of her portrait is the jewelled pistol she brandishes with a finger on the trigger. Misdating the picture, the museum connected this firearm with Teresia's later rescue of Robert. But a loaded gun in Jacobean Sussex hints at a confrontation barely registered in Bloomsbury: 'she eventually reached Rome, living out her days at... the Carmelite convent of Santa Maria della Scala', where she is buried alongside her husband.<sup>19</sup> The Sherleys resided opulently in Rome on the rights to sell relics and rosaries granted by the Pope.<sup>20</sup> This weapon was thus an assertion of a religious fundamentalism Europeans tend to forget when they judge Islam. But

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<sup>16</sup> These contradictions were also airbrushed from the highly sanitised book that originated at the same time as the exhibition from the Iranian exile lobby in Washington: *Shakespeare, Persia and the East* by Cyrus Ghani (Washington D.C.: Mage, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> George Manwaring, quoted in Blow, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 159.

<sup>18</sup> Canby, *op. cit.* (note 5) p. 57. Style and composition of the portrait are identical to the formula of those now in the Suffolk Collection mass-produced as souvenirs of court festivities around 1611-13 by the so-called 'Curtain Master' William Larkin, but not at all with portraiture of the 1620s as proposed.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 228.



*The Guardian* suggested the parallels between Shakespeare's world and the Shah's were less comfortable than the museum, with its optimism about 'soft power', was caring to admit:

Iran has provoked fascination and fear in western Europe for more than two millennia. This fearful incomprehension has only increased since [the Iranian Revolution]. Shia rituals of self-flagellation, relics and martyrs can alienate in a Europe that is rapidly forgetting its own version of such rituals in the Catholic tradition.<sup>21</sup>

In its culturalist fixation on the shimmering surfaces of the silk fabrics that were Iran's main exports to the West, the Shah show did not explore the ulterior purposes of the weapons offered in exchange. That might have been to avoid offending Istanbul: their intended target. But this superficiality was also because the museum's image of Shakespeare's England was too simplistic to explain what the Sherley brothers were doing on a mission that 'ran completely counter to the foreign policy of Elizabeth I's government, which was seeking friendship with the Ottomans on the principle that "my enemy's enemy is my friend"'.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while the catalogue describes the extravagant silk robes, turban and sash Robert wears in his picture as the ceremonial suit in which he was dressed by his hosts when he and his brother were first received by the Shah at Qazvin, there is no mention of the Catholic politics which brought these young Englishmen to Iran, and explain the fact that contrary to the impression given by the museum, 'The Sherley mission had no sanction whatever from the English government'.<sup>23</sup> By coincidence, however, another exhibition opened at the same time in London that also starred portraits of Robert and Tiresia Sherley, and this exposed the naivety of the message that these East-West encounters were all about trade. *Van Dyck* at Tate Britain centred on a pair of equally extravagant images of the silk-swathed couple, but in these the great painter portrayed them in their true colours, with Teresia in her Roman garden and Robert, again flaunting the turban he liked to top with a cross 'to show that he is a Catholic', now as the Shah's ambassador to the Pope.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Madeleine Bunting, 'Empire of the Mind', *The Guardian*, January 31 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Blow, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53-4.

<sup>24</sup> Giovanni Mocenigo, Venetian Ambassador in Rome, to the Doge and Senate, October 3 1609, *Calendar of State Papers Venetian, 1607-10*, XI, p. 361. The cross in Van Dyck's portrait has been painted over at a later date, but it appears in the engraving by Diego de

'I will not give my part of this sport for a pension of thousands to be paid from the Sophy' (II.v.156): the aside is about Sir Anthony's boast to the Earl of Essex of pocketing 30,000 crowns a year to upgrade Iran's artillery. So, baiting Malvolio as 'a kind of puritan' (II.iii.135), it is ominous when Shakespeare's Illyrians compare their violence with the Shah's. The Oxford Shakespeare annotates Fabian's aside by noting that 'In 1599 Sir Robert Sherley returned from an embassy to the Shah and boasted of the rewards he had received'.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Robert would not leave Iran until bound for Rome in 1608, when he was made a Papal count, not knight, and never boasted of anything. Given the wildness of contemporary reports about the Sherleys, textual editors can be relied on to get the brother wrong. The confusion may even have provided a context for Shakespeare's updating of the Plautine plot of identical twins. For the Sherleys' activities in Iran were more significant, and this 'pension from the Sophy' more pertinent to *Twelfth Night*, than any editor yet admits. In reality the brothers were sent east by the Earl of Essex as a manoeuvre *against* the Queen. Under cover of a decoy trip to Italy their errand was to induce Iran to attack the Ottomans, thereby releasing Spain to invade England or compel Elizabeth to purge her Malvolio, the lawyerly minister Robert Cecil, and name as her successor James VI of Scotland, then pledging to usher in the 'golden time' of 'convents' and religious toleration (V.i.169) the play's Duke Orsino is still promising at the end.<sup>26</sup>

*Twelfth Night* can be appreciated without referring to King James's plan for 'a general Christian union'; but without the play's Epiphany theme that 'Journeys end in lovers meeting' it is hard to appreciate what 'every wise man's son' (II.iii.39) knew in 1601 about hopes of the East.<sup>27</sup> For because the Essex plot ended in fiasco the

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Astor depicting Count Robert's audience with the Pope: rpr. in Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 227. See *Van Dyck and Britain*, exh. cat., ed. Karen Hearn (London: Tate, 2009), p. 52-55; Christine Riding, 'The Orientalist Portrait', in *The Lure of the East*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2008), p. 49; and Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in art and literature in Stuart England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 236.

<sup>25</sup> William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, ed. Roger Warren and Stanley Wells (Oxford: O.U.P., 1994), p. 151.

<sup>26</sup> For the false hopes of Catholic toleration James raised before his succession, see William McElwee, *The Wisest Fool in Christendom* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p. 117-19: 'English Catholics were convinced... that James had pledged himself... to remit all fines for recusancy and tolerate their worshipping in private... In Ireland it was almost universally believed that the king was himself a Catholic' (p. 118).

<sup>27</sup> For James's plan for 'a general Christian union', see W.B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1997), p. 34-43, here p. 36.

Sherleys spent their lives covering their tracks, making it as difficult for historians as contemporaries to grasp why these Englishmen 'should be working for the Shah to drum up an alliance against the Ottomans, when everyone knew Elizabeth was pursuing a pro-Ottoman policy'.<sup>28</sup> But in Sussex the Sherley family were known as recusants; and the brothers, who like John Donne were educated in Oxford at Hart Hall when the college was 'a refuge for Catholics', probably converted on arrival in Venice.<sup>29</sup> They thus typified the Catholic gentry at the heart of the Essex rebellion: premature Jacobeans activated by the Earl's commitment to a *politique* measure of toleration like that of Henri IV's recent Edict of Nantes.<sup>30</sup> It was while arms-running for the French king that Sir Anthony was dubbed a knight of the holy Ordre de saint Michel, for which he was gaoled in the Fleet. But if the ecumenical dream of 'A solemn combination' of 'our dear souls' (v.i.371-2) lay behind the delusions about the universal love of God the Sherleys projected onto 'the very devil' in Iran, the violence of the divisions within both Christianity and Islam explains why, as *Twelfth Night* seems to warn, this fooling with religion might all end in blood:

SIR ANDREW. For the love of God, a surgeon – send one presently to Sir Toby.

OLIVIA. What's the matter?

SIR ANDREW. He's broke my head across, and has given Sir Toby a bloody coxcomb too. For the love of God, your help! I had rather than forty pound I were at home.

OLIVIA. Who has done this, Sir Andrew?

SIR ANDREW. The Count's gentleman, one Cesario. We took him for a coward, but he's the very devil incarnate. (v.i.168-76)

'Bloody as the hunter', the 'interceptor' in Shakespeare's comedy, who on 'carpet consideration' is a mere 'knight dubbed with unhatched rapier', unexpectedly turns out to be 'a devil incarnate' whose 'incensement... is so implacable that satisfaction can be none but by pangs of death and sepulchre' (III.iv.196-213). This 'incardinate'

<sup>28</sup> Blow, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> 'Refuge for Catholics': Philip Caraman, *The Autobiography of an Elizabethan: William Weston* (London: Longmans, 1955), p. 187, n. 2: 'Throughout Elizabeth's reign Hart Hall was a refuge for Catholics... Perhaps for this reason it flourished as did no other College in this reign'; Davies, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 5, 135, 167 & 257.

<sup>30</sup> 'Premature Jacobeans': Mervyn James, 'At the Crossroads of the Political Culture: The Essex Revolt, 1601,' in *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1986), p. 426. Essex was 'wont to say that he did not like any man be troubled for his religion': Calendar of State Papers Domestic, p. 649-9.

'incensement' hints at the papal backing for Essex's coup. The traumatic volte-face on which *Twelfth Night* turns, when the harmless 'eunuch' (i.ii.52) Cesario (really Viola in disguise) is confused with 'his' twin, the mercenary Sebastian, does seem keyed to the shock of the plot.<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Bate maintains that since Shakespeare was 'over half-way an Essex man' his *Richard II* was indeed the play the rebels paid to be acted at the Globe on February 7 1601 to rally their rising next day.<sup>32</sup> The first recorded performance of *Twelfth Night* came one year later at Candlemas, the feast of the purification of the Virgin, February 2 1602, in Middle Temple hall. But whatever Shakespeare once wished, his dark comedy with the title of the post-Christmas reality check now looks set to count the cost of 'What You Will'. Strung on a series of mock duels, until its brutal climax when Sebastian plays 'havoc' (v.i.195) with the foolish knights, this Epiphany play pushes its warning to be careful what you wish so cruelly that it suggests the author shared the astonishment when Essex led his mob of 'angry young men in a hurry' in the stampede across London they planned to be 'the bloodiest day that ever was'.<sup>33</sup> For the 'strange regard' Olivia and the other characters give the warlike brother who appears to have 'made division of [him]self' (215) mirrors the consternation with which the onlookers greeted these 'Rash, inconsiderate, fiery voluntaries, / With ladies' faces and dragon's spleens' (*John*, II.i.67-8), when the 'viragoes' turned out to be in earnest, and bringing not love but war:

I am sorry, madam, I have hurt your kinsman,  
 But had it been the brother of my blood  
 I must have done no less with wit and safety.  
 You throw a strange regard upon me, and by that  
 I do perceive it hath offended you. (v.i.201-5)

For a New Year celebration *Twelfth Night* is notoriously unsatisfying, its 'dark house' (IV.ii.30) unenlightened and its 'air of pestilence' (I.i.19) unpurged when Orsino declares that until Malvolio is

<sup>31</sup> See Richard Wilson, 'Bloody as the Hunter: *Twelfth Night* and the French Duel', in *Shakespeare and French Theory: King of Shadows* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 202-26.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Soul of the Age: the Life, Mind, and World of William Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 272.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 482-3.

pacified 'We will not part from hence' (v.i.371).<sup>34</sup> For though Fabian hopes its 'sportful malice' will 'rather pluck on laughter than revenge' (354-5), the unprecedented belligerence of *Twelfth Night* leaves the Duke's project for a 'solemn combination' stalled, hanging on an ambiguous 'suit' (269) prosecuted by Malvolio against the master of the ship carrying the twins which was wrecked before the start. Orsino gives orders to 'Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace'; but the steward's implacable last words, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you', do not augur well when it is belatedly remembered 'He hath not told us of the captain yet' (365-8). Since it appears that the 'maid's garments' Cesario remembers wearing when 'The captain did first bring me on shore' can never be rediscovered until the prisoner is freed from 'durance' (267-9), the page's equivocal sexuality is therefore a screen for all the unfulfilled desires of this interrupted time of gifts. In fact it is difficult not to view Malvolio's sudden court 'action' (v.i.268) as symbolic of the trials after the coup, with many of the rebels, including Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, stuck in legal limbo in the Tower pending pardon from King James. As the steward is to be 'both the plaintiff and the judge' (343), it looks as if in Illyria 'there shall be no more cakes and ale' (II.iii.104). But in no other Shakespearean comedy is the promise of 'the present hour' (v.i.346) paralysed by quite such a sense that (in the words of the song that 'Sherley' pun again on 'Shah') 'What's to come is still unsure' (II.iii.45).

With Feste singing 'There dwelt a man in Babylon' (71), or swearing by St Anne that 'ginger shall be hot in the mouth' (305), the revellers of *Twelfth Night* struggle to deliver the gifts of the day of kings, but they still expect them to come from the Orient: the jape to make Malvolio the king of beans has him smiling like 'the new map with the augmentation of the Indies' (III.ii.67-8). Yet the unfinished lawsuit with the sailor puts a question mark over the eastern journey that initiates this plot, reminding us how Sebastian had refused to disclose his destination when Antonio begged to 'know of you whither you are bound': 'No, sooth, sir. My determinate voyage is mere extravagancy' (II.i.8-10). We never do learn where the twins were heading when their ship sank off the Illyrian coast, nor why its master

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<sup>34</sup> For the play's ritual associations with the lights of Twelfth Night and purification of Candlemas, see Chris Hassel, *Renaissance Drama and the Church Year* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 77-101.

is now liable to be accused and imprisoned by, of all people, Malvolio. But if the steward is in fact a stand-in for Cecil's Protestant regime, the eastern Mediterranean setting acquires a risky topicality in light of the government's pro-Turkish strategy, and the Sherley brothers' operations to subvert this with their mission to the Shah. The stalemate of *Twelfth Night* then reads like Shakespeare's suspended judgement on those presents promised from the East. Constance Relihan notes how he seems to repress the orientalism of his main source, Barnaby Riche's romance 'Apollonius and Silla', set in Constantinople and Cyprus.<sup>35</sup> Yet the trial of the Captain actually makes his play contingent on a voyage as *indeterminate* as that of the brothers who had altered their tale so often about their business in Iran. Thus, when the Shah asked Sir Anthony to lead a return embassy to his purported patron Elizabeth, who wanted never to see him again, he persuaded Abbas to make him an emissary 'to all Christian princes'; and it seems it is the 'extravagancy' of this suit, ongoing as Shakespeare wrote, on which *Twelfth Night* attends:

FESTE. Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere, for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing. (II.iv.72-6)

In *Twelfth Night* everything quibbles on a silk suit. Thus, at the start 'the suit from the Count' (I.v.93) is blocked because Olivia 'will admit no kind of suit' (I.ii.41), but after many 'another suit' (III.i.100), with even Antonio arrested 'at the suit of Count Orsino' (III.iv.292), Sebastian does not go 'suited to his watery tomb' (V.i.227). By the time this was all put on for the suited silks in the Temple Sherley had altered the case for his suit to the Shah so suavely, due to the breaking news of Essex, his agent in Italy was saying 'if we were to go for dinner I would end up paying the bill'; and the factor of the Levant Company that had sponsored him to *open* the silk road into Turkey wrote from Aleppo that he was 'a warning to know how to trust such slippery gentlemen'.<sup>36</sup> So it may not be chance that, as Keir Elam notes, in *Twelfth Night* 'As

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<sup>35</sup> Constance Relihan, 'Erasing the east from *Twelfth Night*', in Joyce Green MacDonald (ed.), *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance* (Madison: Associated University Presses, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 113 & 132.

in no other play, material – the textile, weave and colour of fabric – determines not only distinctions between characters but events themselves.<sup>37</sup> This fixation on transforming textiles – running from ‘flax on a distaff’ (I.iii.85) worked by ‘The spinsters and knitters in the sun’ (II.iv.43) to the cypress crepe of Olivia’s veil (III.i.113), damask silk of Viola’s fantasy sister (II.iv.111), and the velvet gown (II.v.43) worn by Malvolio in his dreams – emphasises ‘the centrality of clothes’ to self-fashioning.<sup>38</sup> But as with Sir Andrew’s ‘divers-coloured stock’ (I.iv.114), or the cross-gartered ‘yellow stockings’ (II.v.174) that trip the steward up, such silky objects of desire prove treacherous, as if the ‘strange body’ of foreign trade was ‘*inside* England’s stately home’, along with ‘changeable taffeta’ and Persian rugs.<sup>39</sup> Thus, ‘We have no great opinion of his wisdom,’ the English ambassador moralised when Robert Sherley appeared in Spain in 1609, ‘for coming with a turban on his head’.<sup>40</sup> If *Twelfth Night* does efface the ‘East’ which is its referent that might then be because, as Patricia Fumerton observes, silk suits like those of the Sherleys were truly *disorienting*, since they suggested the dangerous strangeness of the orient had now arrived and come inside:

Something strange was happening to England’s wealth, and no one knew where exactly to point the finger... to reify the trouble “out there”, to embody strangeness in particular foreign nations, peoples, or events that could be quarantined from the home trading body. For the paradox was that whenever the English actually fingered an embodied culprit responsible for trouble, it turned out that the English were involved. Strangeness “out there” was also “in here”.<sup>41</sup>

Robert Sherley ‘much affected to appear in foreign Vests... and accounted himself never ready till he had something of the Persian habit about him’, scoffed Thomas Fuller.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, ‘My Lady’s a Cathayan’ (II.iii.68), exclaims Sir Toby. Though he brags he will fight

<sup>37</sup> Keir Elam, ‘Introduction’ to William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Twelfth Night* (London: Cengage Learning, 2008), p. 42-3.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2000), p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. 194-5.

<sup>40</sup> Francis Cottington to William Trumbull, December 20 1609, quoted in Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 228.

<sup>41</sup> Fumerton, *op. cit.* (note 39), p. 174-5.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Fuller, *The Worthies of England* (1662), ed. John Nichols (2 vols., London: 1811), vol. 2, p. 393.

'To the gates of Tartar' (II.v.179) on the Shah's frontier, any impaled head will be his own, however, for in *Twelfth Night* the orient 'resembles nothing more than England'.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the very word 'Cathayan' connotes not a 'lying Chinese', as editors gloss, but a European 'going native' in the East.<sup>44</sup> As Richard Marienstras emphasises, rather than projecting violence onto the alien Shakespeare persistently situates it within the familiar, and 'in every case, the near is more dangerous than the far'.<sup>45</sup> Nowhere is the play's relativizing of oriental violence more pointed, therefore, than in the torment of Malvolio, a revenge for the treason trial of Edmund Campion, 'the old hermit of Prague, that never saw pen and ink', in the words of a Catholic poem, as despite the Rackmaster Thomas Norton, author of *Gorboduc*, the Jesuit never signed a confession for that 'niece of King Gorboduc' (IV.ii.12-15) the Queen.<sup>46</sup> This cruel mock trial leaves the steward 'more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog' (44). But Feste's roles in it are 'Sir Topaz' and 'Master Parson' – priests Henry Garnet and Robert Parsons – and these tie the charade to Sherley's scheme.

References to 'the old hermit of Prague', 'Sir Topaz' and 'Master Parson' continue to bemuse editors, but they acquire significance from the religious politics of the Essex Plot. For Sir Anthony had arrived in Rome via Moscow and Prague in April 1601, and conferred at the Spanish embassy with Parsons, when the talk, however, was all of 'the attack on London'.<sup>47</sup> Parsons guessed the reason the Shah's envoy was now plotting against England instead of Turkey was the 'maltreatment' of a third brother – the 'notable pirate' and 'salt-water thief' (v.i.63) Thomas – by Cecil, 'in taking his wife and keeping her openly' as his mistress: just as Malvolio plans.<sup>48</sup> Shakespeare's informant could have been the clown Will Kemp, with whom Anthony gossiped in Rome.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Elam, *op. cit.* (note 37), p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy Billings, 'Caterwauling Cataians: the genealogy of a gloss', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54 (2003), p. 1-28.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Marienstras, *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985), p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> For the background to this scene, which oddly defeats editors, see Michael Graves, *Thomas Norton: The Parliament Man* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 250-65. Like Malvolio, Norton had the tables turned when he was himself imprisoned in the Bloody Tower: p. 394-403.

<sup>47</sup> The Duke of Sessa to Philip III, April 10 1601, quoted in Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 135.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Persons to Ralph Eure, April 30 1601, quoted *ibid.*, p. 72-3.

<sup>49</sup> See David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1987), p. 36-7.



But 'It is common knowledge that the City is extremely alienated from the Queen', Sherley stated, 'because of the death of the Count of Essex'. So, 'Strike at London', he was reminding Parsons, 'and you strike at England's heart'.<sup>50</sup> He was right. Londoners were appalled by the Earl's execution, which had happened just when the Iranian delegation was crossing the Alps. Such was the apparent 'wreck past hope' (v.i.73) to which dreams of a 'golden time' had been reduced by the real time of *Twelfth Night*. But that Shakespeare was able to create an opening out of this impasse was perhaps due to the Shah after all: against his brother's return Abbas was holding the youngest of the Sherleys hostage in Iran.

'He hath had wonderful great entertainment of the [Shah] with many exceeding rich gifts', marvelled the English consul in Aleppo when Sir Anthony began his reverse embassy, before adding: 'His brother remaineth in Persia until his return. God grant his voyage return good'.<sup>51</sup> Robert was, in fact, now the Shah's 'slave', according to Vatican informants, and the eighteen-year old boy went everywhere as 'a favourite of the King, who generously gave him everything he needed'. He had 'gained the goodwill of the King by whom he is liked,' ran the despatches, 'because he renders services' according to local 'habits and customs in things far from edifying'.<sup>52</sup> Just what these services might have been is suggested by other memoirs. As a lover of Persian verse and a 'composer of rhapsodies and part-songs', the Shah frequented coffee-houses where 'boys performed lascivious dances to the accompaniment of flutes', one elderly Spaniard complained.<sup>53</sup> Sir Thomas Herbert, who accompanied Robert on his final embassy in 1628, recalled how 'youthful pages' played music as Abbas was served at table by other 'Ganymede boys'.<sup>54</sup> And John Thaddeus, a Carmelite, related that provincial governors would send beautiful youths as gifts, that he 'kept more than two hundred boys' in his harem, and that he

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<sup>50</sup> The Duke of Sessa to Philip III, April 10 1601, quoted by Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 135.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Colthurst to John Sanderson, July 26 1599, quoted *ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> *Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVII<sup>th</sup> and XVIII<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (London, 1939), I, p. 143-4; and Alfonso de la Cueva, Spanish ambassador in Venice to Philip III, March 12 1608, quoted *ibid.*, p. 168 & 212.

<sup>53</sup> Don Garcia Figueroa, *L'Ambassade de D. Garcia de Silva Figueroa en Perse* (Paris: 1667); and Antoine De Gouvea, *Relation des Grandes Guerres et Victoires par Le Roy Perse Chah Abbas* (Rouen: 1646), quoted in Blow, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 120 & 169.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia, 1627-9* (London: 1928), quoted *ibid.*, p. 166-7.

'was accompanied by forty naked boys when he went to the baths'.<sup>55</sup> No wonder King James wrote to the Shah asking after Robert.<sup>56</sup> That this court culture of pederasty and music was governed by eunuchs Abbas had personally castrated may have added urgency to the news circulating in 1600 with the *True Report of Sir Anthony Shirley's Journey* that the younger of these English brothers had been left behind. To the discomfort of Islamic clerics the British Museum chose to highlight a portrait of the Shah 'lounging next to a handsome page-boy who pours him wine' in its publicity, however. A poem inscribed on the picture, we were told, compares 'the lips of the beloved' to 'the lips of the cup' and wine to love.<sup>57</sup> And in the show itself other steamy lyrics about the 'food of love' (1.i.1) illustrated the long and explicit Persian literary tradition of spiritualised pederasty. These poems were not translated. But if Shakespeare was similarly inspired by the Sherley case it seems the exhibition curators were not the first to use the homoeroticism of the 'Sophy's' musical banquets to negotiate the violence of religious extremes:

ORSINO. Give me some music. Now good morrow, friends.  
 Now, good Cesario, but that piece of song,  
 That old and antic song we heard last night;  
 Methought it did relieve my passion much...  
 Come hither, boy. If ever thou shalt love,  
 In the sweet pangs of it remember me;  
 For such as I am all true lovers are,  
 Unstaid and skittish in all motions else  
 Save in the constant image of the creature  
 That is beloved. How dost thou like this tune?  
 VIOLA. It gives a very echo to the seat  
 Where love is throned. (II.iv.1-21)

Viola's plan to 'serve this duke' by convincing the Captain 'it may be worth thy pains' to 'present me as an eunuch to him', so as to sing 'And speak to him in many sorts of music' (1.ii.53-4), is often explained as a dramatic false start.<sup>58</sup> But Elam establishes that the figure of the eunuch continues to haunt this play; and Stephen Orgel

<sup>55</sup> *Chronicle of the Carmelites* (note 52), quoted *ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>56</sup> Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 139.

<sup>57</sup> Canby, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 251; Farah Nayeri, 'Iran's Fidgety, Cruel Shah Abbas in British Museum Show', Bloomberg News, February 17 2009.

<sup>58</sup> See T.W. Craik, 'Introduction', *The Arden Shakespeare: Twelfth Night*, ed. J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 10.

proposes that when acted by a boy the part of Orsino's 'little Caesar' insinuated 'a world of possibilities that were, to a Protestant society (perhaps temptingly) illicit'. These critics relate Cesario's musical offering to opera in a Catholic Rome where boy-castrati excited fantasies that were 'simultaneously heterosexual and homosexual'.<sup>59</sup> But as Relihan points out, the play's authorization of homosexual desire is also 'linked to its delicate negotiation between eastern cultures and English values'.<sup>60</sup> Bruce Smith indeed sees *Twelfth Night* as a rewriting of the Renaissance 'Myth of the Shipwrecked Youth', which ordinarily introduced same-sex desire in a Moslem setting in order to reinforce existing prejudice. Thus, when Shakespeare has Orsino cherish Cesario because the 'Dear lad' has a 'small pipe' like a 'maiden's organ... And all is semblative a woman's part' (i.iv.29-32), he challenges the ways in which this hostage narrative operated to police 'the dangerous fact of sexual desire between a man and an adolescent boy', Smith asserts, and that disorientation is more than simply sexual, for 'If we have undergone a rite of passage, it is a journey toward another country, not a return trip to the shores we left behind'. 'Getting outside oneself, experiencing the world through somebody else's eyes', according to this evaluation, 'is central to [the] comic vision' of *Twelfth Night*.<sup>61</sup> The escape from the seraglio would become the story for a later Orientalism. But at this instant when relations between East and West were determined more by Christian schism than any anti-Islamic crusade, the perfumed garden of the harem offered Shakespeare a cultural scenario, it seems, to turn a hostage crisis into hospitality, and western prejudice to eastern promise.

If the imaginary 'Persia' of the 'Sophy' is a pretext for Shakespeare's Illyria, this may reflect the real Illyria, as the pluralistic, multi-ethnic home of James VI's favourite Catholic, Marco Antonio De Dominis Archbishop of Spalato. Improbably, it was this Adriatic divine, who later settled in London, whose books and letters offered 'the most systematic treatment' of the project of Christian union which the king

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<sup>59</sup> Keir Elam, 'The Fertile Eunuch: *Twelfth Night*, Early Modern Intercourse, and the Fruits of Castration', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47 (1996), 1-36; Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1996), p. 53-7.

<sup>60</sup> Relihan, *op. cit.* (note 35), p. 91.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. 151-6.

adopted.<sup>62</sup> For Shakespeare, however, 'the golden window of the east' (*Romeo*, I.i.112) was always the horizon of such possibilities. Thus theatre historians calculate his playhouse was itself oriented like a church towards the azimuth of 'the worshipped sun' (111), with the stage and entrance fronting 'the point on the horizon where the sun first appeared on St Barnabas Day, 11 June, the summer solstice, at the time of the building of the Globe' in 1599.<sup>63</sup> According to such theories the theatre's eastern alignment is signalled in *Julius Caesar*, the first Globe play, when on the Ides of March Casca points to where 'Some two months hence' the sun 'first presents his fire; and the high east / Stands as the Capitol, directly here' (II.i.105-10). The dramatist's own faith in the awakening promise of the east, as the direction from which come the 'grey lines / That fret the clouds' as 'messengers of day' (102-3), appears to be confirmed by the privileged position of his very grave, as close as possible to the 'golden window of the east' – and thus the resurrection – in Stratford's Holy Trinity church. Yet as his Romans dispute whether 'Here lies the east. Doth not the day break here?' the 'watchful cares... Betwixt [their] eyes and night' (98-100) epitomise the ordeal of indeterminacy which complicates this recurring daybreak scenario on Shakespeare's stage, where in play after play the orientation towards the dawn is mediated by conflicting interpretations, and if this hermeneutic drama leads us to expect some revelation the golden light is received in a Pauline perspective, through a glass darkly. Whatever comes to us from the east, this rose window implies, will be filtered through our fractured Christian frame:

MARCELLUS. Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes  
 Wherein our saviour's birth is celebrated  
 The bird of dawning singeth all night long;  
 And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad,  
 The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,  
 No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
 So hallowed and so gracious is the time.  
 HORATIO. So have I heard, and do in part believe it.  
 But look, the morn in russet mantle clad  
 Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill. (*Hamlet*, I.i.139-48)

'What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east'  
 (*Romeo*, II.i.44-5): Shakespeare's questioning of 'yonder east', where

<sup>62</sup> Patterson, *op. cit.* (note 26), p. 220.

<sup>63</sup> John Orrell, *The Quest for Shakespeare's Globe* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1983), p. 154.

'envious streaks / Do lace the severing clouds' and 'jocund day / Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops' (III.v.7-10), expectancy about the instant 'the all-cheering sun / Should in the farthest east begin to draw / The shady curtains from Aurora's bed' (I.i.127-9), and anticipation of 'grey-eyed morn... Chequ'ring the eastern clouds with streaks of light' (II.ii.1), is so pressing it seems to figure what Jacques Derrida viewed as the messianism of his own stage.<sup>64</sup> Beyond any convention of 'Hyperion's rising in the east' (*Titus*, v.ii.56), this invocation of 'the eastern gate, all fiery red, / Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams' (*Dream*, III.ii.391), and repeated call to 'shine comforts from the East' (III.iii.20), projects an *arrivance* onto the East strikingly dissimilar to Marlowe's equally compulsive identification of 'this eastern world' with empire and exploitation. From Tamburlaine's claim to be 'Monarch of the East', to Barabas' traffic 'East and by south', or Faustus' commerce with 'India, Saba, and farthest countries in the East', the East is named by Marlowe 36 times, yet always in the material terms of merchant or military power.<sup>65</sup> Not once does Shakespeare's rival make the connection that transfixes his own work, between the East and the enlightenment of a rising sun.

Marlowe's Icarian trajectory always careers westward, to see 'the sun fall from his sphere'.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, of Shakespeare's 50 references to 'the East' no less than 25 invoke the sunrise at 'the first op'ning of the gorgeous east' (*Love's*, IV.iii.219). It has become axiomatic for post-colonial criticism, however, that what 'the plays of Shakespeare all suggest is that the plot of English history is unfolding westward – away from Rome *and* England, on a spiritual Crusade for a new Christian world altogether.' From this Protestant perspective Shakespeare shares what Jeffrey Knapp calls Elizabethan England's 'westward longings' for 'a westward future' and an Atlantic escape from 'the dead end of eastward quests'.<sup>67</sup> Yet this American cooption oversimplifies the national identity crisis that has been analysed by Robert

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 3-29.

<sup>65</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *1 Tamburlaine*, I.i.43; *The Jew of Malta*, I.i.40; II.vii.62; *Doctor Faustus*, xii.23-4, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>66</sup> *1 Tamburlaine*, I.ii.176.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), p. 109-11.

Brenner, which was framed by the economic competition between the emergent and Puritan-directed New England lobby and the East India establishment chaired by Catholic grandees.<sup>68</sup> And it overlooks the consistently heliotropic turn of these works, a responsiveness to 'the morning sun of heaven' illuminating 'the gray cheeks of the east' (Sonnet 132) which is the reverse of the Virgilian *transit imperii*, and seems instead to align what Robert Weimann calls 'the commodious thresholds' of Shakespeare's stage away from the conflicts of the sunset world, towards the renewal of the East:<sup>69</sup>

Good morrow, masters, put your torches out.  
The wolves have preyed, and look, the gentle day  
Before the steeds of Phoebus round about  
Dapples the drowsy east with spots of grey. (*Much Ado*, v.iii.27)

'Nay, Cadwal, we must lay his head to th'east. / My father hath a reason for it' (*Cymbeline*, iv.ii.256): if scenes like the funeral in *Cymbeline* look eastward, what shapes their orientation is a receptiveness that contrasts with Orientalism. As Belarius teaches the princes he urges to stoop, as 'this gate / Instructs you how t'adore the heavens, and bows you / To a morning's holy office', this sun-worship is opposite to Marlovian triumphalism, where 'The gates of monarchs / Are arched so high that giants may jet through / And keep their impious turbans on without / Good morrow to the sun' (III.iii.1-9). Belarius' lines recall Tamburlaine's 'giant presumption' to 'ride in triumph through Persepolis'; and since Shakespeare's character is himself coded as a 'sympathetic representation of an English Catholic' his image of 'a malignant and a Turbaned Turk' (*Othello*, v.ii.362) looks like the stock Catholic bracketing of Protestantism and Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>70</sup> It is easy, therefore, to read this Shakespearean heliotropism as simply crypto-Catholic, and assume that as 'The sun represented divinity... sunburn suggested closeness to God'.<sup>71</sup> But this

<sup>68</sup> Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Trade, 1550-1653* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2000), chap 8.

<sup>70</sup> 1 *Tamburlaine*, II.v.50; II.vi.2; 'a sympathetic representation': Donna Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992), p. 157.

<sup>71</sup> Clare Asquith, *Shadowplay: The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), p. 298-9.

mistakes the window for the sun, missing the point that as Derrida observed, the reason this stage turns east is that everything happens on it 'in the penumbra, between night and day', for while it may grieve for those on whom the 'wolves have preyed' it would not be messianic 'if it stopped hesitating about the day to come'.<sup>72</sup> Thus, 'Vigilance without end', is how Emmanuel Levinas described Shakespearean theatre, thinking of the insomnia of *Macbeth*.<sup>73</sup> This is why Derrida imagined Shakespeare as the *spear-shaker* on Europe's starlit battlements – like the watchman on the walls searching for a flame 'burning through the dark' which '*appears slowly from the east*' in the *Oresteia* – who keeps open 'poetic and thinking peepholes' to the daybreak, awaiting the solar event 'as the foreigner itself' with 'a hospitality without reserve accorded in advance to the absolute surprise' of the visitor yet to come, be it a monster or messiah:<sup>74</sup>

The silent hours steal on  
And flaky darkness breaks within the east.  
In brief, for so the season bids us be,  
Prepare... (*Richard III*, v.v.38-41)

'See, see, King Richard doth himself appear, / As doth the blushing discontented sun / From out the fiery portal of the east' (*Richard II*, III.iii.61-3): although there will be many such false dawns in these plays, Shakespeare's preparation for the sunrise gives his dramaturgy the messianic imminence of an epiphany, awaiting 'the sight of day' in 'trembling' expectation of the instant 'the searching eye of heaven' rises in his 'throne the east', and 'fires the proud tops of the eastern pines, / And darts his light through every guilty hole' of a West exposed in all its 'murders, treasons, and detested sins' (III.ii.33-40). This sunrise theme, which recurs like a signature-tune in every genre, reminds us how often Shakespeare's plays are located, as befits dramas regularly staged for Christmas or Twelfth Night, during the liminal hours around New Year, when to Hamlet's disgust, 'The King doth wake... and takes his rouse, / Keeps wassail and the swagg'ring

<sup>72</sup> 'In the penumbra': Jacques Derrida, 'Aphorism Countertime', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 425; 'it would no longer be messianic': *ibid.* (note 63), p. 169.

<sup>73</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 48.

<sup>74</sup> Aeschylus, 'Agamemnon', 25, SD. 26, in *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Eagles (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 104; Derrida, *op. cit.* (note 64), p. 18 & 65.

upspring reels' (*Hamlet*, 1.iv.9). As François Laroque writes, the daybreak celebrations of this 'festival *par excellence*' enacted 'a veritable myth, in which dreams of the Golden Age came true', and 'a period of truce' restored 'a kind of universal fraternity' fuelled by a 'notion of *hospitalitas* which dictated that... houses should open their doors to all'. There was thus a structural affinity between the hospitality of the Shakespearean theatre and those seasonal customs, like the exchange of the Christmas Wassail Bowl or New Year gifts, which were intended 'to extend family conviviality to embrace the whole society'.<sup>75</sup> Shakespeare's eastern orientation was thereby keyed to the journey of the Magi and its annual re-enactment in the advent of the Mummers, or in those fictional embassies from 'The Prince of Purpoole' or the 'Prince of Love' which taught the lawyers of the Inns of Court the suits of immunity – not of the hosts but of their guests.<sup>76</sup>

'Twelfth Day [January 6 1663]... we met with Major Thomson... who doth talk very highly of Liberty of conscience... he says that if the King thinks it good, the papists may have the same... After dinner to the Dukes house and there saw *Twelfth Night* acted well, though it be but a silly play and not relating at all to the name or day':<sup>77</sup> Samuel Pepys' blithe contempt for Shakespeare's comedy gains irony from his failure to connect it with his talk of toleration, but his diary entry provides historical perspective on its hope to 'let no quarrel nor no brawl to come / Taint the condition of this present hour' (v.i.345-6). For 'what's to come' in *Twelfth Night* would take centuries to arrive. But it cannot be chance that the other Sherley play, *The Three Brothers*, was acted in 1609 by a company of Catholic players along with *Pericles* and *King Lear*.<sup>78</sup> 'I do not like the fashion of your garments,' Lear cautions Edgar, 'You will say they are Persian; but let them be changed' (III.vi.73-4). Shakespeare grew wary of this 'Persian' Catholic disguise. Yet *The Three Brothers* seems to share his dream of 'golden time', because it ends with the Sherleys reunited as the Shah gives orders to build 'a church / Wherein all Christians that do hither

<sup>75</sup> François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1991), p. 148-50.

<sup>76</sup> See Meg Twycross and Susan Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Tudor England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 92-100.

<sup>77</sup> Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: IV: 1663* (London: G. Bell, 1971), p. 5-6.

<sup>78</sup> C.J. Sisson, 'Shakespeare Quartos as Prompt-Copies', *Review of English Studies*, 18 (1942), 136-8; and Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in theatre, religion and resistance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 271-93.



come / May peaceably hear their own religion'.<sup>79</sup> This was a vision that even the Calvinistic Thomas Middleton could endorse, when in another Sherley public relations exercise he declared how it was not Robert's 'garments embroidered thick with gold' which 'dazzled' but the 'excellent music of his tongue' that sued so well it had converted the Shah himself into 'confessing and worshipping' Christ.<sup>80</sup>

'Would you undertake another suit,' Olivia likewise assures Cesario in Shakespeare's comedy of silken embassies, 'I had rather hear you to solicit that / Than music of the spheres' (III.i.100-2). In truth, the Sherley brothers would never be reunited, and Robert would soon be reporting 'the hatred [Abbas] bears to Christians... burning and pulling down all Churches'.<sup>81</sup> Yet in Shakespeare's Illyria hopes still centre on Cesario's suit. Sir Anthony had left Iran with thirty-two chests of silk as gifts for European monarchs from the Shah. These were last seen at Archangel, where Sherley stowed them aboard a Dutch ship bound for England. He had perhaps cashed them in to finance Essex, before sailing 'into the north of my lady's opinion' to 'hang like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard' (III.ii.22). Someone who might have known the whereabouts of these presents was his uncle Sir Thomas Sherley, the Treasurer of the Middle Temple. But after the Essex disaster, Sir Thomas was in charge of the lawyers' festivity for a difficult New Year. He had 'a strong motive to stage a prestigious entertainment', and so he commissioned the professional Lord Chamberlain's Men and their musicians to stage a play.<sup>82</sup> The comedy they acted was *Twelfth Night*. So it would be satisfying to think Shah Abbas's silk ultimately paid for Shakespeare's comedy, and that this extravagant New Year gift from the East was a musical offering of 'the food of love' (I.i.1). Certainly, the Persian wise men pursued Sherley in the courts because they claimed their presents had been sold for 'a great price'. But the broker,

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<sup>79</sup> Anon., *The Travels of the Three English Brothers in Three Renaissance travel plays*, ed. Anthony Parr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 131: xiii.179-80.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Middleton, 'Sir Robert Sherley His Entertainment in Cracovia', ed. Jerzy Limon and Daniel Vitkus, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol. 2, p. 674-5: ll. 89-90 & 230-41.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Sherley to Sir Anthony Sherley, 1605, quoted Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 169.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Arlidge, *Shakespeare and the Prince of Love: The Feast of Misrule in the Middle Temple* (London: Giles de la Mare, 2000), p. 56-58 & 114 et passim.

according to Father Parsons, had been 'his friend the captain'.<sup>83</sup> And only the missing captain knew the truth about the 'Sophy's' suit.

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<sup>83</sup> Davies, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 123.